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"IS CUBA GOING RED?" -- PART II

as broadcast over the

CBS TELEVISION NETWORK

Sunday, May 17, 1959

6:00 - 6:30 PM, EDT

Participants: Dr. Ernesto Dihigo, Cuban Ambassador to the United States
Dr. Manuel Bisbe, Cuban Ambassador to the United Nations
Carlos M. Lechuga, Alternate Representative of Cuba to the UN
Rep. Charles O. Porter (D., Ore.)
CBS News Correspondent Stuart Novins
Leo Cherne, Director of the Research Institute of America
Moderator: CBS News Correspondent Howard K. Smith
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from Studio 41, New York

ANNOUNCER: The CBS Television Network presents "Is Cuba Going Red?"

MR. TOWNSEND: Good afternoon, I'm Dallas Townsend. Two weeks ago today CBS News presented a special report entitled IS CUBA GOING RED? Correspondent Stuart Novins reported that Cuba today is becoming a totalitarian dictatorship and is rapidly becoming a Communist beachhead in the Caribbean. The program attracted wide attention and much favorable comment. It also drew criticism from representatives of the Cuban Government, who asked to be heard on the subject. CBS News stands behind its initial report. The material was carefully researched, reported and checked. CBS News also points out that, beginning in the Spring of 1957 when its men visited Fidel Castro in the Sierra Maestra, it has reported what he and other representatives of the 26th of July Movement have had to say. Dr. Castro has appeared on FACE THE NATION; President Urrutia has appeared in an interview and has been quoted frequently. Several representatives of the current Cuban administration appeared in CASTRO'S CUBA, a news special aired on January 28th of this year. Since the first of this year the Cuban Government's viewpoint has been quoted and reported on numerous occasions and on various news shows. Nevertheless, because of the lively reaction to the program of two weeks ago and because of the vital importance of this subject to all Americans, CBS News has decided to provide an opportunity for continued discussion of the issues raised in "Is Cuba Going Red?"

CBS News points out that it is interested only in reporting the facts, that it is not a partisan on the subject of Cuba, or on any other subject. It is objectively reporting the situation in Cuba today as it did during previous Cuban administrations. For today's panel here is our Moderator Howard K. Smith.

MODERATOR SMITH: How do you do. The topic, "Is Cuba Going Red" and the Cuban delegate to the United Nations participants are Mr. Carlos M. Lechuga, Dr. Manuel Bisbe, Cuban Ambassador to the United Nations, Dr. Ernesto Dihigo, Cuban Ambassador to the United States, CBS News Correspondent Stuart Novins, Congressman Charles Porter of Oregon who has taken a special interest in Latin American affairs, Mr. Leo Cherne, the Executive Director

of the Research Institute of America. May we begin with Correspondent Stuart Novins.

MR. NOVINS: Yes, Howard. It is the policy of CBS News that its reporters are reporters and not debaters. I want to make it clear that I am a reporter and not a debater. I am here because personal attacks have been made against me after the report that was made two weeks ago. I would wish to say very clearly that the report that we made two weeks ago was not motivated in any way by any kind of malice. It was a friendly warning which was held up both to the Cuban people, the Cuban government and the American people. If there are any errors in the report they are variances of detail, if they exist, and do not alter the findings. I stand by those as does CBS News. There is one thing more, if I may -- the charges have been made in the Cuban press, since our report, that, in effect, I am on the pay of Mr. Batista. There was another charge that Mr. Batista owned either part of or all of the Columbia Broadcasting System. I don't need to comment on the second report, but on the charge that I am on the pay of Batista, I would point out that I was among the first to report the Batista administration as the kind of reprehensible dictatorship which it was and I think I will stand on that record. Gentlemen, to you, who represent Cuba, I can understand why the Cubans disagree publicly with what I said two weeks ago but I ask only that you accept that what I said or may say in this coming half hour is motivated by friendship for Cuba and Cuba's people. Congressman Porter, I think we should say for the record, that although you are a congressman you are here, I believe, as a private individual. That is my understanding.

MODERATOR SMITH: Can we hear from Mr. Carlos M. Lechuga, Cuban delegate to the United Nations.

MR. LECHUGA: I will read a brief statement answering in a general way what Mr. Novins said two weeks ago. I want to say to the American public only ninety miles away from the Florida coast, the island Republic of Cuba is rapidly becoming one of the most solid democracies of the hemisphere. Its people have at

at last regained the joy of living; they have placed their faith and their trust in the conviction that Cuba's present government will give the nation a permanent system of social justice and respect for human rights.

The struggle of the Cuban rebels has been rewarded by the immense popular backing of the present government. It is not true what Mr. Stuart Novins said in his program, that the Cubans cannot express in public any opposition. The proofs are on the contrary. It is not true that 475 large businesses have been interviewed by the government on economic or political grounds. All of these enterprises were affected by a decree of the Ministry for the Recovery of Stolen Government Property, which was one of the measures most hoped for by the Cuban people since it enables the Republic to recover part of the millions of dollars stolen by Batista and his partners. It is not true that the Government has just decreed a 30 per cent wage increase for editorial employees; and because/that many papers will have to close down. In order to insure the existence of a free press, the new Cuban government has stopped subsidizing newspapers and are studying how to solve the economic situation of some of the publications, but no decision has been taken yet.

The Cuban press now enjoys absolute editorial freedom. The fact that any figure of the government responds to some criticisms does not mean that free press is being curtailed. On the contrary, it is another instance of the free play of opinions, just as it exists in the United States. When President Roosevelt or President Truman, for example, referred to a certain American columnist in rather harsh terms, no one here thought of this as censorship.

There has been talk about the attack against some American news agencies and publications. Obviously Cubans cannot remain silent in the face of unfair criticisms, or when these agencies and publications distort the facts for the sake of sensationalism and try to undermine the prestige of the Government.

It is ridiculous, as Mr. Novins did, to quote a three line item from the Soviet newspaper Izvestia which mentioned the campaign that certain segments of the American press had launched against Cuba and use it as a proof of Soviet support. What App Cuba For Release 2004/05/13 : CIA-RDP91-00965R000200210002-4

statements made by President Eisenhower and no one has ever drawn the conclusion that he is a Communist.

In the CBS program two weeks ago, it was said that the Havana United Press office had received several telephone calls threatening to bomb their local office. We do not know how many calls were made, or if, in fact, the rumor quoted by Mr. Novins is true. However, both Mr. Novins and we are sure that no bomb was ever placed at the UP office. Another point raised by Mr. Novins came as a surprise to us. He said that the Cuban Government had the right to cancel paper import licenses. The truth is that the regulation operating in Cuba, more or less, is the same one existing in the United States as regards Canadian paper. / And, we could say of the U. S. Government, what Mr. Novins say of ours.

Western diplomatic sources, to use the same pattern of Mr. Novins, told us that when he, in May 3rd, asserted that the newspaperman Juan Luis Martin was under arrest on April 16th, he was released ten days before Mr. Novin's program, and is free in his home in Havana. He was imprisoned not because he is an anti-communist, but for different reasons. Not one of the anti-communist Cuban newspapermen are in jail and never were. All of them, including me, are writing daily attacking them, as always.

The new Cuba is a working democracy. And, that, indeed, is the only truth.

MODERATOR SMITH: That was an opening statement of the Cuban point of view. Gentlemen, may I ask you in your further opening statements to try to keep them short because a half hour is a very short time. Dr. Bisbe.

DR. BISBE: I cannot justify the report made by Mr. Stuart Novins "Is Cuba Going Red?" after Dr. Castro's trip to the United States. In fact, our Prime Minister explained very clearly the democratic position of our Government, and dispelled several false statements and rumors about the influence of communism in the present Cuban movement. Of course, there are communists in Cuba, but there are also Communists in this country; nevertheless because of this Mr. Novins will not call Red the Government of the United States. Mr. Novins cannot prove what he says. For instance, he interviewed Mr. David Salvador, Chief of the

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Cuban Labor Movement and asked him if he was now a communist - since nobody has denied that he was a communist when he was young - and Mr. Salvador answered: "I am not a communist now." This would suffice for anybody, but not for Mr. Novins. In spite of this, Mr. Novins affirms, without any proof, that Mr. Salvador is a communist. That is false, absolutely false. I can assure and prove that when the April, 1950 strike was being organized, Mr. Salvador, who for some years had been a member of the 26th of July Movement, rejected the participation of the communist leaders in this strike, and I can add that at present Mr. Salvador is successfully struggling against the communists in the reorganization of the C.T.C. Cuban Confederation of Labor. This is the truth and the whole truth about Mr. Salvador.

Why does Mr. Novins make these assertions without proof and try to mislead American public opinion? Certainly, in Cuba the Revolutionary Government does not persecute the communists, but this, we maintain, is the right position, because if they are persecuted then you make martyrs out of them.

MODERATOR SMITH: Well, Dr. Bisbe, I want to return ---

DR. BISBE: Wait a minute -- a little time. We think that the best way to fight communism is to solve the economic needs of the people.

I conclude. We must reaffirm democracy and build up democracy. To be anti-Red only is not the best way to guarantee democracy in this crucial moment that we are living.

MODERATOR SMITH. Dr. Dihigo?

DR. DIHIGO: Thank you. I only want to say that I think that Mr. Novins' report was not quite fair on account of some of the facts that he said

were not presented in their true light. I am going to refer to only two or three examples. For example, when he interviewed David Salvador he takes a film and he asks David Salvador if he controls the different unions -- telephone, sugar, bankers, laboratories, air lines, radio, television -- what does the American public see? Mr. Salvador, in the film, nodding yes, and what was the truth? Mr. Salvador answers in Spanish that the union is organized, that the other union is organized too but the impression that the American public got was that Mr. Salvador was saying yes, that he, who was presented as a communist, a few words later, had the control of all the union workers in Cuba. A second case is this. Mr. Novins refers to Lawyer DaCosta. DaCosta was the lawyer for the aviators that were tried in Santiago de Cuba and Mr. Novins says the following -- but he has since resigned from the Army and has not been seen publicly since. The implication is that Lawyer DaCosta has been put under arrest or killed or he has been taken away and killed. I know, personally, Mr. DaCosta. He is the brother-in-law of a very close friend of mine and I can assure Mr. Novins that it is true that Mr. DaCosta resigned from the Army but he is enjoying very good health and being free in Cuba. Any time that Mr. Novins comes back to Cuba I will be very pleased to introduce him to Lawyer DaCosta.

MR. NOVINS: I am delighted to hear it.

DR. DIHIGO: In the third place and I am going to finish -- Mr. Novins talks about communist-led unions and elections that had been held in the unions have resulted in a terrible defeat of the communists. The communists have lost almost all the elections in the unions, so where is the communist influence in Cuba? I think naturally that Mr. Novins incurred these mistakes on account that he took his information from very unreliable sources and I can assure Mr. Novins and I am going to finish now -- that if I thought that the Cuban government was communist be sure I would not be the Ambassador in Washington.

MR. NOVINS: Mr. Ambassador, for the sake of the record, I did not say that the Cuban Government was communist anywhere in that report.

MODERATOR SMITH: Can we now call on Congressman Charles Porter of Oregon?

CONGRESSMAN PORTER: I'd like to approach the main question: "Is Cuba Going Red?" And, of course, Mr. Novins answered that question by saying, yes. He said it is rapidly becoming a communist beachhead and it's a totalitarian dictatorship now -- you did say that? -- where you can't stick up your head and argue or you get called a counterrevolutionary and the penalty for counterrevolution is death. Let's examine that.

First of all, all of us here are against dictatorship; all of us are against communism. We are for democracy. We want to see Cuba become a democracy. We are not disagreed on that.

What we are disagreed on: Is it a totalitarian dictatorship now?

I don't think it is. There is a difference between communist infiltration, which we have in this country and in every free country in the world, and communist domination. Let me list six reasons why I don't think Cuba is going Red.

In the first place, Castro and his top leaders -- and some of them are here -- are not communists. They speak out against communism, communist dictators.

Thirdly, Cubans can criticize without reprisal.

I referred Mr. Novins' report to the Inter-American Press Association and John O'Rourke of the WASHINGTON DAILY NEWS referred to Jules Dubois, who is the head of their committee on freedom of the press. Jules Dubois made a very detailed report on the Novins' broadcast, found many errors in it, many errors which I can't go into here today.

MR. NOVINS: Why not?

CONGRESSMAN PORTER: We don't have the---

MR. NOVINS: If you are going to make charges, let's specify.

CONGRESSMAN PORTER: But he ends up, there is freedom of the press today in Cuba.

Now, an election will be announced soon in Cuba, which is an important

thing.

MR. NOVINS: When, Congressman?

CONGRESSMAN PORTER: It will be announced.

MR. NOVINS: When?

CONGRESSMAN PORTER: Five, communists lost overwhelmingly in the recent labor elections.

So, we do have infiltration, yes. We have infiltration everywhere and Cuba has many problems. But Cuba is not a dictatorship today.

Mr. Novins told me before the broadcast, as I suspected, he doesn't speak Spanish very well. He spent two months down there, half of those two months on vacation -- vacation, mind you, in a country that is rapidly becoming a communist beachhead and where a totalitarian dictatorship---

MR. NOVINS: Mr. Smith, I can't allow that to go on.

What is your source of information?

CONGRESSMAN PORTER: My source is Jules Dubois, who is the Cuban correspondent for the CHICAGO TRIBUNE.

MR. NOVINS: Did Mr. Dubois follow me for this month that I was allegedly on vacation?

CONGRESSMAN PORTER: I am reading from his letter: "He spent half his time in what he described as a dictatorship on vacation, according to what he told me when I saw him briefly in Havana."

MR. NOVINS: Obviously, you don't think I am going to tell my competition what I am doing on a story, Congressman. Let's be reasonable.

CONGRESSMAN PORTER: I would think you would have asked Mr. Dubois about freedom of the press in Cuba.

MR. NOVINS: Are you suggesting that the way to cover a story is to have a reporter talk to other reporters?

CONGRESSMAN PORTER: I am suggesting that Jules Dubois is the best authority on freedom of the press in Latin America in the whole country. He has

written this book on Fidel Castro. He has had many medals from people. He knows what's going on down there. And how can you tell about the Cuban press when you can't even read Spanish very well?

MODERATOR SMITH: Gentlemen, we are coming back to this point in a moment. But first, I would like to ask Mr. Leo Cherno to say something before Mr. Novins has a good slug of time to answer some of these statements.

MR. CHERNE: What I would like to say flows directly from one of the most encouraging statements of all made by Dr. Fidel Castro when he addressed the Overseas Press Club in New York during his visit to this country. He said, the best friends of democracy are those who never support tyranny. I accept that. I am sure we all do, and precisely because we accept it we are, of course, all very sensitive therefore to whether or not those who do support tyranny -- and communism is tyranny -- whether they find themselves in any of the key, important spots in a community.

There is no question at all that you gentlemen, representing the Cuban Government, are the best representation of a democratic future. There is no question at all in my judgment that virtually all of the cabinet members of the government are equally that representation.

But I'd like to quote Congressman Porter, in fact. On May 2, Congressman Porter, on the floor of the Congress, described as democratic and able public servants, Finance Minister Lopez-Fresquet, Ambassador Dihigo, Foreign Minister Agramonte. They are the hope of Cuba today, he said.

Then he continued, the opposing faction, however, include Army Chief Raul Castro, La Cabana Fortress Commandant "Che" Guevara, Labor Chief David Salvador, "Revolucion" Editor Carlos Franqui.

"Their policies" -- these are Congressman Porter's words -- "their policies, whatever their intention, are aiding the communists in an attempt to take over the revolution."

The concern which I have and share with many in America, and certainly

the members of the press, is in this effort to take over a government which so richly deserves a democratic, peaceful future determined by its own people.

MODERATOR SMITH: Can we have Stuart Novins now to answer some of the statements that have been made?

MR. NOVINS: There have been a lot of statements made.

CONGRESSMAN PORTER: Are you going to answer them in Spanish?

MR. NOVINS: Let's talk about that for just about thirty seconds. That's just about as ridiculous -- if you forgive the phrase -- as any kind of quibbling I have heard.

For one thing, I think, to follow your suggestion to the logical conclusion, we should withdraw all reporters from the Middle East who don't speak Arabic or Hebrew. We should withdraw every correspondent whoever goes to any country.

The fact is -- I will freely admit it -- it was much harder to do it my way, but I got it done.

CONGRESSMAN PORTER: And you read all the papers, I suppose?

MR. NOVINS: Well, now, what do you want to do? List the papers and have me go down the line?

MR. LECHUGA: May I---

CONGRESSMAN PORTER: Take your---

MR. LECHUGA: ---because Mr. Novins said in his report, that you spoke with hundreds of persons in Cuba---

MR. NOVINS: I did, indeed.

MR. LECHUGA: In English or Spanish?

MR. NOVINS: I spoke in English with those who could speak English and through interpreters with those who did not speak English.

MR. LECHUGA: With hundreds of people in Cuba?

MR. NOVINS: Absolutely.

MODERATOR SMITH: Can we let Mr. Novins have the floor for a moment?

MR. NOVINS: Yes. I have a letter, which is written by Congressman Porter to the Columbia Broadcasting System, News and Public Affairs Department, under the letterhead of the Congress of the United States, although I assume this is a private letter, and in it he accuses me of putting out "a highly misleading report." Those were your words, Congressman?

CONGRESSMAN PORTER: Yes.

MR. NOVINS: He also said: "Half-truths were submitted by Novins," and you also referred to the observations that we made as "extreme and nonfactual statements."

CONGRESSMAN PORTER: Do you want some examples?

MR. NOVINS: Just a minute, Congressman. Let's turn to the Congressional Record. On May 5 this was said by a Congressman on the floor, speaking about our broadcast: "It is an honest, conscientious report." Then the Congressman goes on to say: "Novins' report, on the whole, intelligent, factual and sincere, is, I hope, going to help in the process of cleaning up the situation."

CONGRESSMAN PORTER: I think both---

MR. NOVINS: Just a moment, just a moment. Who said that? Who was the Congressman? Congressman Porter.

CONGRESSMAN PORTER: Right.

MR. NOVINS: You said it?

CONGRESSMAN PORTER: Right.

MR. NOVINS: Will you please explain how it is that I can be factual one day and false a week later on the basis of the same statements?

CONGRESSMAN PORTER: Yes, because by that time I had a report from Jules Dubois, some four pages, single space.

MR. NOVINS: I don't attempt to debate him. He is not here.

CONGRESSMAN PORTER: No. But I had his story about the things you have said there. I had letters from other people about it, too. But Jules Dubois, who is the authority in this field and who received many awards---

MR. NOVINS: Modesty forbids me to suggest that there may be other authorities than Mr. Dubois. I would hesitate to accept anything that any single source gave me, no matter how meritorious it might be.

CONGRESSMAN PORTER: He is the representative of the Inter-American Press Association.

MR. CHERNE: I don't carry the responsibility of sustaining, defending what it is that Stuart Novins did or what, in fact, CBS ever does. I do know, in the spirit in which this program has been arranged, that there is no one at table who has not been concerned about the possibility that the present penetration of certain areas of Cuban life by members of the Communist Party may not, in fact, jeopardize a democracy we all seek. I do know, Mr. Congressman---

CONGRESSMAN PORTER: Let's be specific.

MR. CHERNE: ---that you have been concerned---

CONGRESSMAN PORTER: I have been.

MR. CHERNE: ---that you were deeply concerned when former President Jose Figueres visited, with deep friendship, a sister democracy in Cuba and when he made his first speech to the Cuban people, to have the microphone pulled from his hand by David Salvador and act not only ungracious but containing a good deal more. I do know your concern, Mr. Congressman, so that it isn't really either useful or reasonable for us to jockey ourselves into a position that this is a problem that doesn't exist or is not of significant magnitude.

CONGRESSMAN PORTER: Nobody says it isn't.

MR. NOVINS: This is a problem which is capable of solution, and we mention that in the report. We suggested in the report that the situation could be changed by Dr. Castro if he called a constitutionally guaranteed free election.

Now, the record will show that on several occasions, first he said, we will do it in a year; then he said, we will do it in 18 months to two years. Then he said, we will do it in four years.

CONGRESSMAN PORTER: We are agreed---

MR. NOVINS: Then he said, we won't do it until all poverty is wiped out, until everyone has a hospital bed.

Certainly, we are in favor of poverty being wiped out and we are in favor of hospital beds. But where is the election, which will not drive the communist gentlemen into prison, as has been suggested, but will bring them out in the open where you can count them.

MODERATOR SMITH: This is a specific and serious point. Can some of our Cuban guests answer this?

MR. LECHUGA: I don't get the question. Please repeat it.

MR. CHERNE: The question is: when will the election be held?

We have been concerned because, initially, Dr. Castro indicated that the election would be held within 18 months after the revolution; then, subsequently, he said, two years.

MR. LECHUGA: Yes.

MR. CHERNE: When he was in this country, he said within four years. There has been an additional statement of Dr. Castro in which he indicated there could not be an election until illiteracy, poverty and the other terrible social evils of Cuba are eliminated.

DR. BISBE: As soon as possible we will have elections.

DR. DIHIGO: The last statement made by Dr. Castro in the States was that four years was the maximum term, but that elections would be held as soon as possible, and we are waiting for a new statement from Dr. Castro saying when the elections will take place.

MR. CHERNE: Dr. Dihigo, will you not concede, especially on the basis of the evidence of two other Caribbean nations, Venezuela and Costa Rica, for example, that an election four years after revolution is not exactly the best basis upon which to build a democratic future? You would regard that as rather excessive, would you not, Dr. Dihigo?

DR. DIHIGO: I am sure we will have elections much before four years.

MR. CHERNE: Much before.

The sooner, gentlemen, the better. In fact, if there were an announcement within the next few days that elections will take place within 12 to 18 months, I do believe a great deal will already have been accomplished, Doctor, to guarantee Cuba its democratic future.

MR. LECHUGA: The date of the election has nothing to do with the accusations of Mr. Novins. That does not mean that Cuba is going Red because the government doesn't set a date for the election.

MR. CHERNE: But the reverse is true: if elections are to be deferred for a period of up to four years -- just a moment, I am taking Dr. Castro's statement -- and if, as we do recognize, there are members of the Communist Party in active and significant roles in areas of Cuban life---

MR. LECHUGA: No, no.

MR. CHERNE: ---then it is reasonable to conclude that the two of them do not bode well for a democratic future.

MR. LECHUGA: They have been defeated only recently in union elections that have been held.

MR. CHERNE: That is why they fear elections, because they have been defeated.

MODERATOR SMITH: I'm sorry. Our half-hour has passed very quickly, indeed, I'm afraid. I have to thank you now for an interesting, animated and, I hope, a useful discussion.

A hard and fast judgment on Cuba's future will have to wait until that future becomes a little more present. In the meantime, I hope our Cuban friends will acknowledge that old Latin-American complaint against us is now out of date. The complaint is that we are indifferent to our neighbors. In fact, we are vitally and intimately interested in them, as we hope they are in us.

Good evening.